

VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL GUARD

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Madam Speaker, next month the Virgin Islands National Guard is scheduled to deploy another 100 soldiers to Iraq. Already over 400 have served several tours of duty; of that 100 to be deployed, 36 are women.

We in the Virgin Islands have lost a total of seven soldiers, five Virgin Islanders, and two whose families moved there. Having just lost two of our finest, the first VI National Guard to be killed in Iraq, that April deployment will be a very difficult one not just for the families, but for the entire community. I want to be able to go with a message of hope.

This week we will be debating the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act. This bill sets a reasonable timeline for troop withdrawal, ensures funding needed to ensure that our troops are trained, protected and equipped while in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that they are properly cared for when they return.

Colleagues, this is an important bill; our country needs us to pass it. I want that when the April deployment ceremony comes about, I can meet my VI National Guard knowing that they will not be there for more than one tour, that they will have what they need to get the job done, that they will come home in a time certain, and that all the services they need will be there for them when they return. That is a message that will make all the difference in the world to them and their families.

IMPROVING NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Madam Speaker, common sense says the closer you are to the problem, the better you are able to address it. Unfortunately, No Child Left Behind seems to say the opposite. It says that if you are a bureaucrat in Washington, you understand the needs of public education across America better than anyone else does. Educators, however, know that that is not the case.

After meeting with dozens of teachers, principals and administrators in my district, I am convinced that it is time to give our States a choice. That is why I am supporting the A-PLUS Act introduced last week. The bill would allow States to opt out of the burdensome regulations attached to No Child Left Behind; it would let local leaders decide how best to spend their Federal education dollars; and it would allow the challenges we face in public education to be addressed by those who understand them best, local educators. I urge support for the A-PLUS Act.

SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS WHEN THEY COME HOME

(Mr. FILNER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. FILNER. The verdict is in, my colleagues. Both the Defense Department's health services for returning troops and the Veterans Administration are strained to the limit; they are almost to the breaking point. For as much money that we give them, we have not prepared for the influx of the troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. The evidence is clear.

What was happening at Walter Reed that was outlined in the Washington Post has, in fact, educated the whole Nation. We have had cover stories in the news magazines on how veterans are falling through the cracks. There was an incredible documentary on ABC News by Bob Woodruff and how his brain injury was treated and how fellow vets had their brain injuries treated. And yesterday on CNN we had a story on how Iraqi troops returning were homeless already.

We simply have got to meet this test as a Nation. The Democrats are trying to do that. We put an additional \$3.6 billion into the continuing resolution to fund this year to help our troops. And in the supplemental we have \$3.5 billion for our Nation's troops. It is time to support our troops when they come home.

FINISH IT

(Mr. POE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, there are a lot of clever words for quitting in Iraq: withdrawal, realignment, redeployment, the terms go on and on.

The cloud of defeatism grows larger and larger in Washington, D.C. Numerous pieces of legislation have been introduced in this House, from outright retreat and withdrawal to letting Congress become the generals of the war.

Taking money from the war effort leaves our troops there at risk. There seems to be three alternatives: retreat with defeat; stalemate, which seems to be the current situation of fighting not to lose; or, three, supply more troops to the ones that are there so they can finish the job and then come home. The third choice seems to be the wisest.

Congress tried to tie the pursestrings in the Vietnam War. Congress tried to prematurely bring the troops home in Vietnam, and we know the results in Vietnam. We fought that war as if not to lose it.

It is in the best interest of the United States to help our military finish their mission in Iraq and stabilize Iraq before we leave.

And that's just the way it is.

DEMOCRATS HOLD THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABLE FOR PROMISES THEY MADE

(Mr. PAYNE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAYNE. Madam Speaker, over the past year, the Iraqi Government has made countless promises to the Bush administration, but they have yet to live up to them. Military generals and experts have already concluded that there is no military solution to the civil war, and that the only way to cut down on violence there is through political and diplomatic channels.

While President Bush addressed the Nation to announce his troop escalation plan, he promised America, and I quote, "America will hold the Iraqi Government to the benchmarks it has announced." A newly released Pentagon report concludes that the Iraqi Government is still not living up to the promises it made last year. The Iraqi Prime Minister vowed to reform his government, beginning with his cabinet and his ministers, but the Pentagon report says that not one of these steps has been taken.

It is time for Congress finally to hold the Iraqi Government accountable. If the Prime Minister is not committed to following through on his promises he made to our President, then it is only fair for us to reevaluate our commitment to them. The day of an open-ended war is over.

RECOGNIZING SUCCESS

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, our new strategy in Iraq is working. Just last week, General David Petraeus, commander of the coalition forces in Iraq, gave his first briefing regarding the situation on the ground. Specifically, General Petraeus reported that the Iraqis are fulfilling their obligations, having sent 10 Army brigades and nine police brigades into Baghdad.

The Iraqi Government has unshackled U.S. forces, allowing them to target both Shiite and Sunni militias. Numerous weapons reserves have been uncovered, car bomb factories have been destroyed, and top al Qaeda members have been captured. Unfortunately, too many of my colleagues refuse to acknowledge these successes. Some have lost sight of the most important factor, achieving victory. Al Qaeda spokesman Zawahiri has declared Iraq and Afghanistan the central front in the global war on terrorism. As the parent of an Iraqi service veteran, I know we must win to protect American families.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11.